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EARLY CHILD MARRIAGE IN NIGERIA CAUSES, EFFECTS AND REMEDIES

Buzome Chukwuemeke

Dept of Educational Foundations
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
e-mail ebuzome2013@yahoo.com
Phone no:08038714263

&

Henry Nebechi Ugwu

Dept of Sociology/Anthropology
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
e-mail: henryhills02@yahoo.com

&

Momoh Aneru Radietu

Department of Sociology/Anthropology
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
e-mail:radietumomoh84@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper examines early child marriage; it looked at the causes, effects and remedies in Nigeria. It examines the concept of early marriage and trends of early child marriage. The paper also present and discuss the adverse effects of early child marriages: viz, psychological and mental stress, lack of personal development and contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), which is prevalent in our today's society. The paper concludes by recommending that the objectives of sustainable development goals in the (SDGs), Beijing conference on women and empowerment among others be upheld by stakeholders. The paper further recommended for total abolition of early child marriages in Nigeria and encourages the government, community leaders and the entire populace to join hands to ensure the root causes of early child marriage is drastically reduced. It further recommended that there should be effective information dissemination to grass root level. The paper concludes that government is expected to encourage human right watch to help put an end to the practice of early child marriage in Nigeria today.

Keywords: Marriage, Early Child Marriage, Causes of Early Marriage

Introduction

Child marriage is a custom all over the world, whereby children are given into marriage well before they attain puberty in most cases or even the age to get married as defined by several laws in Nigeria and other countries of the world (UNICEF, 2014). Many young girls are married without full consent and this is a key factor in realizing sixth sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is common to find a prevalence of such practices widespread in several parts of the world particularly in Africa, Asia, and South America. Child marriages are frequently associated with marriages that are conceived and arranged by parents, whereby, only one marriage-partner usually the female is a child (Mosaku, 2008). Child marriage is one of the strongest social malaises which must be eradicated to improve on the quality of life of the girl child in pursuit of sustainable development (UNFPA, 2012; UNICEF, 2013). This practice has prevailed despite the fact that many countries in Africa have a legal regime on the minimum age for marriage which is either pegged on 16 or 18 depending on the country. Some reasons adduced in favour of the practice like conflict, poverty, religion, and tradition escalates incidence of early marriages. In Nigeria, the number of early marriages prevalent in most cultures with most girls married off by age 15, and several others married off by the time they attain the age of 18. The case of Wasila (Tasi'u) Umar, the 14-year-old Nigerian child bride standing murder trial for killing her husband again raises the issue of the legality of child marriage in Nigeria. Also, Wasila, 14, was given out in marriage to Umar Sani, 35, in Gezawa, outside the northern city of Kano in April, 2014. Seventeen days into the marriage, Wasila was accused of murdering Umar and three of his friends by food poisoning, at her own wedding party. She alleged that it was a forced marriage to a man she did not love and did not want to have a relationship with. Soon after she was arrested, Wasila told her lawyer Hussaina Ibrahim that she had been tied to the bed and raped by Sani on their wedding night. The Gewaza High Court rejected a motion to have murder charges against her quashed, ruling that the trial should proceed. She stands the risk of conviction and death penalty. However, the activities of human rights groups condemning child marriages highlight its attendant consequences have considerably brought a remarkable decline of the practice in several parts of Nigeria. In this paper, it is argued that the high incidence of early child marriage in Nigeria is alarming despite the Nigeria's international human rights

obligations, much is needed to eliminate detrimental cultural practice of child marriage of young girls in Nigeria and proffered a solution to this menace.

Concept Early Marriage

The term “early marriage” refers to both formal marriages and informal unions in which a girl lives with a partner as if married before age of 18 (UNICEF 2005). Similarly, UNFPA (2006) defines early marriage and child marriage as any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years, before the girl is physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing. Child marriage, on the other hand, involves either one or both spouses being children and may take place with or without formal registration under civil, religious or customary laws. Ango (1991) defined early marriage as either marriage of an adolescent girl or boy, marriage of an adolescent girl to a matured man or vice-versa and this happens at puberty when the individual is getting matured. The marital age according to Molokwu (2000) is above age of 18 years, when the individual is physically, socially, academically and emotionally matured to cope with the challenges of marriage. The Nigerian review draft decree put marriage age of the girl-child at 18 years. The UNICEF (2001) on the rights of the child recommends that children should not be separated from their parents before 18 years unless it is considered necessary. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) states that any betrothal or marriage of a child should not have any legal status. The Committee that monitors this convention states in 21 (Article 16(2)) that the minimum age for marriage for both male and female should be 18 years, the age when “they have attained full maturity and capacity to act”. Most early marriages are arranged and based on the consent of parents and often fail to ensure the best interests of the girl child. Early marriages include some elements of force, (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi 2003). Some scholars argued that instead of looking for a universal age at which girls and boys should not marry, the focus should be eliminating the unwanted effects of early marriage (www.lawilb.utoronto.ca/Diana.htm). Some suggests that universal age of marriage is not appropriate because societies have different understanding of what it means to be a child as well as different socio-economic and cultural realities. Bunting (1999) proposes that governments should be allowed to set the age of marriage below 18 years of age, but that the onus is on them to demonstrate that this lower age does

not result in any discrimination or adverse consequences for women. Child marriage is the practice of marrying a young girl generally below the age of eighteen to an adult. In most cases, it is always a young girl married to a matured man. It is a situation where female adolescents and teenagers are married to adult husbands. In these instances, sometimes, the men can be twice their ages and these females become child brides. Adedokun, *et. al.*, (2012) observed that child marriages are often arranged in two distinct ways, within a context of force and coercion, either by parents or other persons in positions of authority in the family arranging their young daughter's marriage to an adult, often a much older man or arranging the future marriage of two children. It is not uncommon to find girls of 7 -14 years already married off with the girls sent off to live with the families of the husbands. Generally, the prospective husbands are selected based on social, religious and monetary factors, age is not a factor, as husbands are on the average 12 years older than the child brides in monogamous unions and up to 15-20 years older in polygamous unions (Population Council, 2005) and in isolated cases, may be several decades older. Child marriage equals early marriage. This inevitably denies children of school age their right to the education for their personal development, preparation for adulthood and effective contribution to the future well-being of their family and society. The number of years of a girl's schooling and the postponement of marriage is firmly established by demographic and fertility studies. Women with seven or more years of education marry four years later and have 2.2 percent fewer children than those with no education. It has been observed that there is better tool for effective development than education of girls. It lowers infant mortality, promotes health, improves nutrition, raises economic productivity, enhances political participation and prepares the ground for educating the next generation. The clarion call for the liberation of the girl-child from the shackles of early marriage and her attendant relegation to a vulnerable position has continued to be resisted with traditional customs and religious beliefs, despite the United Nations declarations (UNICEF, 2001) on the fundamental human rights of the girl-child. Child marriage is a problem that undermines global development efforts towards achieving more educated, healthier and stable populations as it involves discontinuance education, early severance of family ties, separation of child-bride from her peers, domestic violence, early sexual activity and child bearing associated with health complications.

The practice has received universal condemnation and has been identified as contributing greatly to the slow pace of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV/AIDS, cervical cancer, sexually transmitted diseases, VVF, malaria and other diseases) in many countries. Judging from the array of socio-medical consequences of early marriage, it is only logical for countries to legislate against child marriages. Nigeria followed suit by enacting 'Child Rights Act 2005' which amongst others out rightly prohibits child marriages. The paramount issue however, is the effective implementation of this law.

Overview of Early Marriages

Early marriage is sometimes called child marriage is very common and affect children who are as young as 9 years old. Ironically some of these young girls actually reach puberty in the houses of their husbands. The practice sometimes, is that very young girls are given in marriage to husbands who are old enough to be their grand fathers and are commanded to remain there and be good wives. Violence occurs when the child refuses sex; she is violently assaulted sexually and ends up being pregnant at a very early age. Many of these girls experience obstructive labour and consequently develop fistula and are abandoned by both husbands and parents to their fate (Childs Right Information Network, 2011). In many of these early marriages, the children are given to the men free for economic gains to the family or to build alliances for business or political benefits. In Nigeria, early marriage is a widespread practice, particularly in the northern part of the country. There, it is believed erroneously that when a girl is married off early, she does not have the opportunity to become promiscuous. It is also believed in most parts of northern Nigeria that it is permissible for a man to marry a child as young as the age of 9 as long as sexual relations with her is postponed until she has attained puberty. But unfortunately in almost all the cases, the child brides are forced into sexual intercourse with their spouses as soon as they are married resulting in very early pregnancy and resulting into vesico vaginal fistula (VVF) obstetric fistula, when such girls give birth eventually at very tender ages. This traditional practice is certainly violence to the girl-child and it is prevalent in several countries in Africa as well. The Justification for toleration of the practice of childhood marriage was twofold; (Note 2)

the prevalence of customs and perceived religious reasons by families on the basis of the importance placed on virginity at the time of marriage; it was believed that child marriage will foreclose possibilities of sexual contact that would tarnish the family honour. Poverty is another reason for this practice, early marriage of young girls in the family leaves fewer children to be fed in the home and this can also attracts higher bride price from suitors or a younger bride could attract a smaller dowry depending on where one stands on the divide.

It is obvious that early marriages are definitely harmful to girls as it robs them of their childhood innocence and turns them into “adults” prematurely. The tender ages in which they are given into marriage render them unable to negotiate safe sex and are therefore vulnerable to diseases and domestic violence. There is also the trauma of relationship with an old man the age of their fathers and grand fathers. In most cases, early marriage deprives a girl-child the opportunity of education, as she begins early to bear children at a very tender age and cater for them instead of going to school. The sad thing about this situation is that, it is contrary to Nigeria’s obligation in international law to guarantee the girl child’s access to education and freedom from discrimination in the educational sphere (CRC, 1989). In 2000 the Cross River State House of Assembly in Nigeria passed a landmark bill prohibiting early marriages in that state. In the Eastern States of Nigeria, there also exists a law that fixed the minimum age for customary law marriages. 16 years is the minimum age for marriage under this law. According to Olateru-Olagbegi, (2011) the fact is that, this law is ineffective and moribund as there is still some incidence of child marriage in various communities in Eastern Nigeria with its attendant evils particularly to the health of the girl-child who has been married off prematurely. In Bauchi state has a law dealing with early marriages. Early marriage is accepted and practiced by a number of tribes and communities all over Nigeria just as it is elsewhere, the attendant evils are the same even in those places. The incidence of early marriages described earlier, is very common particularly amongst Moslem communities in Nigeria. The unfortunate aspect of early marriage is that, as a result of its extremely religious and cultural worth in the communities where it is practiced, child marriage enjoys the support and patronage of the entire community, it is so condoned that members of the community would conceal the practice rather than expose perpetrators (Dhital, 2011). Islamic law seems to condone early marriage to

a child and supports the right of men in law, over their female counterparts. Islamic scholars assert that there is no age limit fixed by Islam for marriage; children of the youngest age may be married or betrothed even though they insist that a girl should not be allowed to get married until “she is ripe for marital sexual relations”. Perhaps this accounts for the prevalence of the practice of child marriages in Northern Nigeria where very young girls between 12 and 14 are withdrawn from primary schools, to get married to husbands as old as their grand fathers. The pathetic case of Hauwa Abubakar, a 9 year old girl who was married off to one Mallam Shehu Garuba Kiruwa a 40 year old cattle dealer is instructive here. Hauwa’s father was indebted to the proposed husband and as a settlement for the debt forcefully gave Hauwa as wife to Shehu at the tender age of 9. She attempted to escape from the husband’s house unsuccessfully on two occasions as on each occasion she was brought back by her father, on the third occasion; her parents brought her back and to forestall further escape, the husband pinned her down and chopped off her legs with a poisoned cutlass. In reaction to this inhuman treatment, the government of Bauchi state at the time swiftly enacted a decree empowering government to prosecute any parent who withdraws a child from school for marriage. Senator Yerima former governor in Nigeria as well as a senator of the federal republic of Nigeria and the 13-year-old child he took as wife from Egypt with the controversy it generated nationwide, some in support of that marriage, others against it, depending on where one stood in the cultural divide on early marriages is another case in point. Senator Yerima’s act was a direct contravention of the Nigerian Child Rights Act and Egyptian law. Egyptian law gives the minimum age which a girl can be married as 16 and also prohibits a marriage conducted between a girl and a man 25 years older than her. The Child Rights Act gives the minimum age for marriage as 18 and also states that where a person marries a child under the age of 18, he is liable to a term of 7 years imprisonment and a fine of 500,000 Naira. After agitations by civil societies, women and child rights advocacy groups, the National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP) invited Yerima for interrogation. In a statement given by him after being questioned, he stated that as a Nigerian, he has the right to practice his religion and his religion does not give an age for marriage, he has therefore not committed any offence. According to Majau (2012), every girl has dreams about her wedding day; after all it is supposed to be one of the most important days of her life.

But somehow it is doubtful that somewhere in that dream any girl imagines she would still be an actual child on that day. Yet that is the reality for many child brides in many different parts of the world. Emphasizing the danger involved in such child marriages, the English court in *Alhaji Mohammed v Knott* (1966), where a Nigerian Moslem man, aged 26 entered into a polygamous marriage in Nigeria with a girl of 13 years and took her to England, when subsequently a complaint was made before the juvenile court that the girl was in need of care, protection, control and was exposed to moral danger, the justices decided that it was immaterial that the marriage was recognized as valid by a court, since the girl was exposed to moral danger, allowing a continuance of the marriage would be repugnant to any decent minded man or woman, accordingly the girl was ordered to be committed to a local authority. Ladan (2010) surmises that another critical protection problem facing girls in Nigeria is the widespread practice of early arranged marriages. A huge number of girls are married off by their parents or guardians in their early teens, when they are too young for their consent to be sought or given. In many cases, they are married to much older men, sometimes men old enough to be their fathers or even grandfathers. Among the numerous implications of early teenage marriage is the increased likelihood of early pregnancy, with its attendant heightened risks of maternal mortality and morbidity. He stressed that the practice is a fundamental violation of CEDAW, which in Article 16 states that both partners have “the same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent”. The article states that the betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect”. It adds that states should take all necessary action, including legislation, to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory. He emphasized that two of the most serious harmful traditional practices affecting girls and women in Nigeria are female genital mutilation and child marriage. In some parts of Ethiopia and Nigeria several girls are married before the age of 15, some as young as the age of 7 (UNFPA 2005). In most cases married girls are not in school; only a few married girls are in school compared to unmarried girls. Most married girls as a result of early marriage cannot read or write at all. These girls are denied the proven benefits of education, which include self reliance, improved health, self confidence, lower fertility, better judgment and increased economic productivity. Early marriage still poses a lot of

problems in most parts of Nigeria, even amongst the people of eastern Nigeria, where it is practiced and justified in the name of tradition, culture, and their religion. What is more, girls in the rural areas are more vulnerable as they are forced into early marriage as a result of poverty. The people in the Eastern parts of Nigeria still believe and succumb to this deep rooted tradition which dates back to pre-historic times. Even though early marriage is prevalent in Nigeria as a whole, northern Nigeria has some of the highest rates of early marriages in the world. Although the practice of polygamy is decreasing in Nigeria, 27 percent of married girls aged 15-19 are in polygamous marriages. In the northern parts of Nigeria, girls are forced to marry very young and several have been removed from school as soon as they reached puberty. Many fathers remove girls in rural areas from school at age 12 to get married and such girls are exposed to gender-based violence like domestic abuse and sexual violence. Nigeria is a party to international treaties and conventions that prohibit child marriages and commit States parties to take measures to eliminate the practice. CEDAW (1979) frowns at early marriage before a girl attains the age of 18 since children lack 'full maturity and capacity to act. The UN Convention on the Rights of Child (1989) and Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that marriage should be entered only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. It follows that in situations where one of the parties getting married has not attained the stipulated age of 18, such consent cannot be said to be 'free and full'. D'Onofrio, Eve (2005), posits that laws regarding child marriage vary in the different states of the United States. Generally, children 16 and over may marry with parental consent, with the age of 18 being the minimum in all but two states to marry without parental consent. Those under 16 generally require a court order in addition to parental consent. In Yemen, Widespread child marriage jeopardizes Yemeni girls' access to education, harms their health, and keeps them second-class citizens, Human Rights Watch said in a report released three years ago. The report which comprised of 54-pages, documented the lifelong damage to girls who are forced to marry young. Yemeni girls and women narrated to Human Rights Watch how child marriages are forced on families and women having no control over when to bear children and other important aspects of their lives. The women complained that marrying early had brought an abrupt end to their education, and some said they had been subjected to marital rape as well as domestic abuse.

The unfortunate thing is that, there is no legal minimum age for girls to marry in Yemen. Many girls are forced into marriage, and some are as young as 8. In April 2008 in Yemen, Nujood Ali, a 10-year-old girl successfully obtained a divorce after being raped in the guise of early marriage. Her case prompted calls to rise the legal age for marriage to 18 and in 2008, the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood proposed to define the minimum age for marriage at 18 years. The law was passed in April 2009, with the age voted for as 17. Unfortunately the law did not see the light of day as it was dropped the following day following manoeuvres by opposing parliamentarians (Power Carla 2009).

Trends in child marriage in Nigeria

Owing to rapid socio-economic and demographic transformations, young families find it more and more difficult to fulfill their numerous responsibilities. Many struggle to overcome poverty and adequately provide for the younger and older family members. It is also more and more difficult for them to reconcile work and family responsibilities and maintain the intergenerational bonds that sustained them in the past. In response to these trends, the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family are focusing on exploring family-oriented policies and strategies aiming mainly at confronting family poverty; ensuring work-family balance and advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity. The preparatory process is to accelerate progress in family policy development; demonstrate its relevance for overall development efforts and draw attention to the role of different stakeholders in achieving these goals (The family Watch, 2013).

However, Fertility behaviour is conditioned by both biological and social factors. And as in other traditional African societies, including Nigeria, several factors have contributed to sustain relatively high levels of fertility. These factors include high level of infant and child mortality, early and universal marriage, early child bearing as well as child bearing within much of the reproductive life span, low use of contraception and high social values placed on child bearing. In the face of perceived high infant and child mortality, the fear of extinction encouraged early marriage and high procreation with the hope that some of the births would survive to carry on the lineage. The traditionally high values placed on marriage ensured not only its universality but also its occurrence early in life with the consequence that child bearing started early in life and in most cases continued until late in the reproductive

span. The institution of polygamy which sometimes promotes competition for childbearing among co-wives also contributed to sustain high fertility. Use of modern contraception was traditionally unacceptable as it violated the natural process of procreation. The traditional long period of breast-feeding and postpartum abstinence guaranteed adequate spacing between children. Available evidence suggests that there have been changes in these socio cultural factors over time. Age at marriage appears to have increased, though minimally when viewed at the national level. Use of modern contraception has increased, and improved education (especially of women) appears to have gradually eroded some of the traditional values placed on child bearing (Bamikale & Bankole, n.d).

Childbearing affects people's welfare and lifestyle in a number of ways. Some of these effects may be foreseen by the parents themselves and perhaps be desired. For example, in Nigeria, children provide the parents with certain emotional pleasures, which of course is one reason why they want to *have* children. More specifically, studies (Hoffman & Manis 1979; Nauck & Klaus 2007; Kravdol, 2010), shows that trends in early marriage in Nigeria is that children may show affection, and also help their parents feel that life has a purpose, they may be seen as giving the parents adult status (relevant only for the youngest parents), it may be fun for the parents to engage in various activities with the children, and it may be exciting to see them develop. More importantly from the perspective of this paper, early marriage and childbearing in rural Nigeria, contributes to the family income through agriculture or other types of work. Further, financial support from adult children may be important to the poorest segments of the elderly population in these countries, especially where public support systems are not well developed. Children may of course also provide *practical* assistance when the parents are old or sick or are under special pressure for other reasons (Antonucchi et al. 2003; Barefoot et al. 2005; Lusyne & Page 2008).

Negative effects of early marriage in Nigeria

The Family watch (2013) posits that Family poverty is the inability to cover adequately the family's basic cost of living — the cost of housing, clothing, education, health care, utilities and transport— as a result of insufficient income and/or access to basic social services. Chronic poverty noticed within young families in Africa, bound to continue in the next generation. Children in families living in

poverty are more likely to miss out on adequate care as parents are engrossed in day-to-day life demands. Poor families, to cope with poverty, may be forced to adopt strategies jeopardizing the future development of children, such as limiting nutritious meals, postponing health-related care owing to expenses or taking children out of school so that they can contribute to the family income. Consequently, many children living in low income households experience academic and behavioural problems and employment difficulties later in life.

However, the negative side of early marriage in Nigeria is that, there are large expenses involved. A child needs, for example, food, clothes and equipment for leisure activities, and the parents will either have to forego some income because one of them (typically the mother) must withdraw from the labour force to care for the child the first years (Joshi 2002, OECD 2002), or they must pay others to do the child care. One or both parents may be able to put in extra hours of gainful work to ease the situation, but the family may still end up with a relatively weak economy. It should also be noted that withdrawal from the labour market may be a loss not only economically, but also because of the social and other pleasures one may enjoy at the work place (perhaps not fully matched by the pleasures of spending more time with the child), and because a smaller economic contribution may weaken the woman's influence vis-à-vis her partner more generally.

Okoku (2011), states that Family size in his study of family size and its socio-economic implication, comes with its implications of poor health, inability to provide adequately for the education of their child, low standard of learning and the inability to fulfil one's dreams in life especially on the side of women. The three basic necessities of life, food, clothing and housing are essentially issues to determine stability or dissolution of family in Nigeria. Notwithstanding, the undesirable effect of early marriage; most often is a result of factors such as ignorance, culture and demographic factors. And most people involved lack access to high level of education, health, income, better accommodation, access to capital and potable water.

Factors responsible for Child Marriage.

Child marriage, generally defined as marriage before age 18, is not limited to any one country or continent. Generally, girls living in rural areas marry earlier than girls in urban areas. In rural areas of Nigeria, for example, 21 percent of young women,

who are now 20 to 24, were married by, age 15, as compared to 8 percent in urban areas (Alexandra and Charlotte, 2011). According to Aduradola (2013), the followings are the causes of child marriage such as Cultural and Social pressure; persecution, forced migration and slavery; financial challenges; politics and financial relationship; religion and child marriage. Poverty and economic transactions; notions of morality are major causes of child marriage (Adebambom, 2010). Underlying causes of early marriage are many and include poverty, parental desire to prevent sexual relations outside marriage and the fear of rape, a lack of educational or employment opportunities for girls, and traditional notions of the primary role of women and girls as wives and mothers (UNICEF, 2008). Child marriage is often deployed as a response to crisis, considered by families and communities to be the best possible means of protecting children. Fear of rape and sexual violence, of unwanted pregnancies outside marriage, of family shame and dishonour, of homelessness and hunger or starvation were all reported by parents and children as legitimate reasons for child marriage in Somaliland, Bangladesh and Niger. Poverty, weak legislative frameworks and enforcement, harmful traditional practices, gender discrimination and lack of alternative opportunities for girls (education) are all major drivers of child marriage. Fragility of environment breeds particular fears and anxieties that cause parents and girls to resort to early marriage as a protection against risk whether real or perceived (Initiative Paper Series, 2013). Lack of education, the lower value placed on girls' education, school drop-out, gender-based violence (including sexual violence) and early pregnancy, can be both causes and consequences of child marriage. In many societies, women and girls are subject to deep-rooted norms, attitudes and behaviours that assign them a lower status than men and boys within the household, the community and in society at large. These beliefs deny girls their rights and stifle their ability to play an equal role at home and in the community (Davis, Postles & Rosa 2013).

Rationale for Early Child Marriages

Several reasons have been adduced for the prevalence of child marriages. Sometimes, it may depend upon socioeconomic factors. In some instances, they are used to secure and maintain political ties. Families cement financial and or political ties by having their children marry. The betrothal is a binding contract upon the families and the children. In such cases breaking the betrothal have serious

consequences for the families as well as for the betrothed individuals themselves. Again in certain cultures, where daughters are considered a liability, poor people in the society willingly give out their daughters for marriage early.

Poverty, religion, tradition, and conflict also take the centre stage of child marriages in Sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed several marriages are tied to poverty, with parents needing the bride price of a daughter so as to feed, clothe, educate, and provide for the rest of the family. Meanwhile, a male child in these countries is more likely to gain a full education, gain employment, and pursue a working life, and marrying later at his own time. In many parts of Africa, a man pays a bride price to the girl's family in order to marry her. This payment made by way of cash, cattle, or other valuables, is believed to reduce as a girl gets older.

Gender inequality is one cause of early marriage, in most communities, the age long patriarchal lining of the people leave women and girls to occupy lower rung in the societies, consequently women and girls are denied their rights and ability to play an equal role like their male counterparts in the communities to fulfil their potential. The frequency of wars and conflicts all over the world also puts pressure on parents to give their underage girls into marriage as during such periods, they are belaboured with economic pressure.

Conclusions

The following conclusion were made

Early child marriage is a barrier for girls not to have basic education as they abandon the pursuit of education and start early to rear children immediately they enter into a husband's house. In this paper an attempt has been made to explain the various concepts various concept of early marriage and relate it to current situation in Nigeria. Early marriage results into poor sexual and reproductive health for child brides, as they are incapable of negotiating safe and protected sex with their partners who are much older than them. Indeed child marriage violates the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which has been domesticated by several countries including Nigeria. It is important that Nigeria endeavours to prosecute culprits found guilty to account and those who cover up to eliminate or prevent gender crimes. The violations of the rights of women in the society affect society as a whole and not merely the persons violated. In its efforts to fight against violations of child rights, UNICEF is fundamentally opposed to forced marriages at any age,

particularly child marriage, where the notion of consent is non-existent and the views of the bride or groom, ignored This paper discussed the trends of child marriage in Nigeria, factors responsible child marriage. The paper argued that the reasons why parents give out their children in early marriages include poverty, weak legislative frameworks, harmful traditional practices, gender discrimination and lack of alternative opportunities for girl child especially education are the major drivers of child marriage. In addition, lack of political will coupled with multiplicities of laws accounts for non-apprehension and prosecution of offenders thereby allowing them to hide under religion and continue to perpetrate crime against humanity.

Recommendations

Based on this paper the following recommendation were stated

- There is need to raise consciousness amongst the people on the extent of early marriage in our communities they should be engaged in public campaigns and incentive schemes; this should be carried to parents, community leaders, and policymakers on the rights implications of early marriage in young girl.
- The governments should encourage parents and communities to send girls to school on time and keep them in school to have basic education. It is emphasised that early marriage threaten child's human rights, in other to protect child rights, the minimum of 18 years should be the basic minimum requirements of validity to every marriage.
- The government and national assembly should rise to harmonise all laws necessary to deter child marriage in Nigeria.
- Education opportunities should be provided by the government (Federal, State, and Local government, free education should be provided most especially at the primary and secondary school levels, thereby, reducing or even totally eliminating child marriage in the country.
- Providing opportunities for girls to continue their education or earn money, while expanding their skills and available choice in life is one effective strategy to delay marriage.

- The government needs to provide free health care services to young women. These young girls and their parents also need to be informed of the dangers inherent in involving in child marriage and the risk involved in it. By doing so it would reducing rate of child marriage in Nigeria.

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